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Weekend, December 18-20, 2015 metro.us | t: MetroBOS | f: MetroBoston

DANNY PICARD ON PATRIOTS

After scare, Pats right back in AFC driver's seat. 16

Fontbonne violated gay man's work rights. 4

A supersecret supper club for foodies. 15

The Dark Side is back in "The Force Awakens," which won't let you down. 12-13

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INFORMATION SESSION

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SHKRELI ARRESTED

1 Martin Shkreli, who triggered public outrage after raising the price of a prescription drug by more than 5,000 percent, was arrested Thursday for engaging in what U.S. prosecutors said was a Ponzi-like scheme at his former hedge fund and a pharmaceutical company he previously headed. REUTERS

US, CUBA RESUME FLIGHTS

2 The United States and Cuba have agreed to restore scheduled commercial airline service between the two countries for the first time in more than five decades, exactly a year after they started the process of normalizing relations. The latest step to restore U.S.-Cuba ties after 54 years of hostility will not go into effect immediately but should eventually increase tourism and business on the Communist-ruled island. Once implemented, the agreement will allow U.S. airlines to sell tickets on their websites for flights to Cuba. REUTERS

FCC WANTS PLAN DETAILS

3 The Federal Communications Commission said it has asked Internet providers to discuss innovative data policies in the wake of the government's net-neutrality rules. FCC staff sent letters to AT&T, Comcast and T-Mobile "to come in and have a discussion with us about some of the innovative things that they are doing." REUTERS

7 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW

BOSTON COMMON TREE FRAMED

7 This is the 44th year that Nova Scotia has given a tree to the people of Boston as thanks for relief efforts following the December 6, 1917, explosion of a munitions ship in Halifax Harbor.

MAIN PHOTO BY NICOLAUS CZARNECKI, ALL OTHER PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

GUNFIRE AFTER MEETING

4 Gunfire erupted Wednesday night soon after a meeting to demand an end to the recent increase in South End violence. A man was shot in the back near Washington Street and Massachusetts Avenue. The shooting occurred after area residents met at the United South End Settlements center to discuss the surge in violence that has recently plagued the neighborhood. REUTERS

MONUMENTS REMOVED

5 New Orleans city leaders voted Thursday to remove several high-profile monuments honoring leaders of the Confederacy, joining a national movement in response to the shooting deaths of nine black churchgoers in South Carolina in June. The city has been debating since this summer a call by Mayor Mitch Landrieu to remove the monuments amid a broad push to take out of public display the Confederate battle flag and other symbols used by the pro-slavery South during the Civil War. REUTERS

BAR OWNER GUILTY

6 The owner of the Cleveland Circle bar Roggie's pleaded guilty to interfering with an investigation after a person was found critically injured outside the bar. John Rogaris pleaded guilty to charges of withholding evidence during a criminal investigation, witness intimidation and two counts of misleading an investigation. NATE HOMAN

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Help Metro make magic

Please donate to the Metro Magic annual holiday toy drive during the 2015 holiday season.

In keeping with the holiday spirit of giving, Metro is once again launching Tony's Metro Magic, our annual toy drive for underprivileged children in Boston, New York and Philadelphia.

This year marks the seventh anniversary of the toy drive, which was renamed in memory of the man who oversaw the project for more than four years, Tony Metcalf, Metro's longest-running editor-in-chief. Mr. Metcalf passed away in 2013 from colon cancer at the age of 50.

Metcalf lit up every year as he saw the faces of children unwrap their holiday gifts. It is our goal to keep that magic alive. We are now asking readers to contribute what they can to Tony's Metro Magic.

Lilliana, 2, opens up a present. NICOLAUS CZARNECKI

Metro has created a wish list at the Target website that readers can access by going to www.metro.us and clicking on the Tony's Metro Magic logo.

From there, just choose the toys you wish to donate, pay online using Target's secure payment system. Your gifts, along with your name attached, will be delivered to Metro's offices in each city. This season we hope you will remember the children who will spend the holidays in shelters or who may not have gifts to open. Even one small gift can make a big difference in a child's holiday season.

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Marathon bombing survivor White dies from sudden illness

Boston Marathon bombing survivor Kevin White, who suffered a concussion and perforated eardrum because of the explosion that left six dead and about 280 others injured, has died after contracting a sudden illness, reports said.

White, 37, was at the Boston Marathon finish line when the two bombs went off. His parents, with whom he was watching the race, were also injured. His mother broke several bones and his father's right leg was amputated.

"I know he and his parents suffered immeasurably in the aftermath of the 2013 Boston Marathon bombings. His spirit will be forever intertwined with mine. His example will inspire me to live with greater purpose. It was an honor to be his coach and friend," co-founder of the Marathon Coalition, Rick Muhr, told the Boston Globe.

Muhr also told the Globe that White, who had run the past two marathons, was planning on running in 2016.

"He will be missed, and the world will miss all of the experiences he had yet to have," White's brother Andrew wrote in a statement.

White held a master's degree from Vanderbilt University and worked in private equity, according to his obituary, He is survived by his parents, his brother and sister-in-law.

A funeral will be held on Saturday at 10:30 a.m. at St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church in Bolton. MATTHEW LEE

BRIEF

Boston-area Catholic school violated gay man's work rights, court rules

A Boston-area Roman Catholic girls' high school violated a gay man's rights when it revoked an offer for him to work as director of food services after he revealed on a form that he was married to another man, a state court has ruled.

Matthew Barrett last year sued Fontbonne Academy in Milton, Massachusetts, south of Boston, saying it had discriminated against him when it revoked a job offer made in 2013 after learning of his sexual orientation.

The school argued that as a Catholic institution, it had an obligation for all staff to model the values of the church, which teaches that homosexual activity is immoral.

Massachusetts Superior Court Justice Douglas Wilkins late Wednesday rejected that argument, noting that Barrett had been offered a job that did not involve teaching ethics but simply preparing food.

"He was not denied employment for any advocacy of same-sex marriage or gay rights; he only listed his husband as an emergency contact on a 'new hire' form," Wilkins wrote.

He noted that Fontbonne also employs people who are not Catholic as well as those who are married outside the church.

"I'm ecstatic," Barrett said following the ruling. "What happened to me was wrong, and I truly hope it doesn't happen to anyone else."

Fontbonne said in a statement: "We have received the court's decision in this matter and are considering our options."

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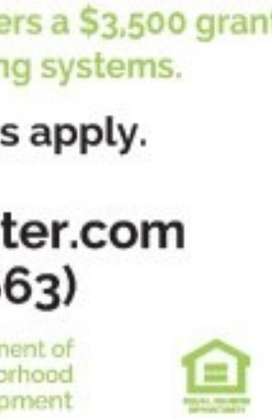

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Security stepped up for 'Star Wars: T

Double-check theaters' policies before you head to the movies with your toy blaster in tow.

SPENCER BUELL
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spencer.buell@metro.us

Movie theaters and cities around the country were beefing up security as they prepared for the release of "Star Wars: The Force Awakens" this week.

Anticipating large crowds, police in Boston promised to have extra patrols on the street and said the department had been in touch with area cinemas to talk security.

"We have asked that they step up their security manpower and increase visibility both inside and outside of the theaters. Many theaters are recommending that patrons leave any large backpacks at home," BPD spokesman Stephen McNulty told Metro.

In Philadelphia, a manager at the Cinemark University City Penn 6 theater, Troy Pugh, told Metro there would be a strict no-toy-weapon policy. The theater bans both toy guns and lightsabers, he said.

Pugh also said there would be two guards and a police officer on duty at the cinema, and said more guards would be on call in case the crowd is larger than expected.

> *"We've been preparing for this movie for a couple of months."*
> Pugh

"We've been preparing for this movie for a couple of months," Pugh said. "We're definitely prepared, so everything should be fine."

Hoping to warn any toy-gun-toting fans, AMC theaters, the national cinema chain, released a list of rules for excited moviegoers looking to dress up.

"AMC does not permit weapons or items that would make other guests feel uncomfortable or detract from the movie-going experience," the advisory reads. "Guests are welcome to come dressed in costume, but we do not permit masks or face paint. In short, bring your lightsaber, turn it off during the movie, and leave the blaster and Darth Vader mask at home."

One of the many super-fans wearing movie-themed get-ups to theaters was Barbara So of Gloucester, Mass., who had been at the AMC Boston Common since midnight for a day-long "Star Wars" marathon.

Barbara So and her fiance, Cameron Lowe, dress as their favorite characters as they attend a "Star Wars" movie marathon in anticipation of the new film. NICOLAUS CZARNECKI/

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'he Force Awakens'

She and her fiance, Cameron Lowe, who brought green and blue lightsabers, did their homework and read through the outfit policy before donning costumes, she said.

"We wanted to make sure there wasn't anything that was going to prevent us from getting access," she said.

National Amusements, another cinema chain, is also upping its security presence, spokeswoman Rachel Lulay told Metro.

"With increased crowds we increase security, as will be the case with 'Star Wars,'" Lulay said in an email.

The chain also has a policy on movie fan attire that bans face-coverings and fake weapons.

"Guests are welcome to dress in costume with movie-related accessories, however we reserve the right to respectfully inspect all items that our guests may decide to bring with them," Lulay wrote.

Many theater managers declined to comment to Metro about safety precautions, deferring to their national corporate headquarters.

Back in Boston, where the City Council recently voted to ban all lifelike guns in public places, the police spokesman advised "Star Wars" fans to leave their mock futuristic handguns and "items which may be viewed as legitimate weapons" at home.

Asked about which items from the "Star Wars" universe would count as looking "legitimate," McNulty said in an email: "I would say a toy blaster could be viewed as a firearm — a lightsaber would not be confused with any weapon based in reality."

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Neighbor who bought guns for California shooters arrested

A law enforcement source said Enrique Marquez, who converted to Islam, and Farook apparently plotted an attack around 2012 but abandoned the idea.

Weapons confiscated from the attacks. SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY SHERIFFS DEPARTMENT

A former neighbor suspected of supplying guns to the married couple who massacred 14 people in San Bernardino, California, has been arrested, the Los Angeles Times reported on Thursday, citing federal authorities.

Enrique Marquez, a friend and former neighbor of Syed Rizwan Farook, 28, who carried out the Islamic State-inspired Dec. 2 attack with his wife, Tashfeen Malik, 29, will be charged with conspiring to provide material support to 'terrorists'.

Marquez, 24, who had checked himself into a Los Angeles-area psychiatric facility shortly after the shootings, had several connections to Farook and Malik and quickly became a key figure in the investigation of the shootings. The FBI, which is treating the attack as terrorism, raided his home and questioned him for several days. Sources said Marquez cooperated during their interviews.

Marquez, who had known Farook since they were teenage neighbors in the city of Riverside, legally purchased the two AR-15 assault-style rifles that the couple used in their attack on a holiday party of Farook's co-workers. Farook, the U.S-born son of Pakistani immigrants, and Pakistani-born Malik were killed in a shootout with police a few hours after their assault on the party. REUTERS

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Katy Perry and Andrea Bocelli: Hedge funds party despite losses

Hedge fund managers faced a tricky question this holiday season: how to thank employees but not offend disappointed clients.

Despite a year of heavy losses for some in the industry, anecdotal evidence suggests holiday traditions were upheld and, in some cases, embellished, with guest appearances from pop star Katy Perry, acrobatic entertainers and at least one weekend sojourn to Florida as just some of the treats on offer.

Sliding commodity prices, a blow out in junk bonds and dramatic sell-offs in sectors such as healthcare have made 2015 one of the worst on record for the hedge fund industry.

Ken Griffin's Citadel marked its 25th anniversary with major parties last month. One, in its hometown of Chicago, was a black tie affair

Singer Katy Perry GETTY IMAGES

featuring Perry backed by costumed dancers and an elaborate lighting display, according to video clips of the event posted online. Another, in New York, featured band Maroon 5 and violinists suspended by strings. Citadel's main hedge funds have again performed well this year and the firm now manages a record $25 billion.

Other holiday parties, according to people with knowledge of them, included Fortress Investment Group hosting employees at high-end event space Gotham Hall in New York, Tudor Investment Corp. gathering staffers at The Pierre, a Manhattan luxury hotel, and Whitebox Advisors throwing an annual event near its Minneapolis headquarters.

Representatives for Citadel, Viking, Fortress and Tudor declined to comment or did not respond to a request.

SkyBridge Capital, the hedge fund investment firm led by Anthony Scaramucci, held a relatively low-key dinner event for staffers at the Manhattan restaurant he co-owns, Hunt & Fish Club. SkyBridge has been known to throw major parties at its annual "SALT" investment conference in Las Vegas and at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, among others.

The firm's fund of hedge fund portfolios have lost a small amount of money this year, but Scaramucci couldn't resist one flourish at the New York dinner: star singer Andrea Bocelli. The blind tenor, a personal friend of the SkyBridge founder, was in town for a concert at Madison Square Garden and Scaramucci invited him and his wife to the party as guests, according to a familiar with the situation.

Bocelli came and, according to the person, asked if there was a piano. Wearing sunglasses and a scarf, he was soon belting out Ave Maria, a traditional Christmas song that references a prayer to the Virgin Mary.

REUTERS

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SEXUAL VIOLENCE BY COPS IS OFTEN IGNORED

ERNEST OWENS

The Ernest Opinion

Award-winning multimedia journalist Ernest Owens is a keen observer of social, LGBT and race issues in Philadelphia. Follow him @MrErnestOwens

The numbers are staggering: 40 hours of deliberation; 18 guilty verdicts; 263 years in prison.

Those are the numbers out of an Oklahoma courtroom for ex-police officer Daniel Holtzclaw, holding him responsible for numerous incidents of first-degree rape and forcible oral sodomy of multiple female civilians, mostly women of color.

The numbers — and press coverage — are anomalous.

Unlike the seeming ubiquitous coverage of a seeming endless string of police killings of young black men, we don't hear much about the substantial number of women who have been sexually assaulted by cops.

A recent report by the Cato Institute found that after brutality (choking, beating, shooting) complaints, sexual misconduct was the most reported allegation of officer misconduct.

But just as our society sails to seriously addressing rape culture in general, it's no wonder that we haven't paid proper attention to sexual transgressions by cops who are supposed to protect and serve us all.

The main reason such incidents don't set off media alarm bells — in comparison with other injustices — is based on the particular subpopulation most vulnerable to police sexual violence: black women.

According to the Women's Prison Association, black women are incarcerated at 3.75 times the rate of white women, thus having more interaction with police, and overall, have a higher chance of being raped.

> *"Vulnerability, desperation, interrogation and stigma pervade spaces where Lady Justice should be wearing a blindfold to race, gender and class."*

Cops like Holtzclaw take advantage of the socioeconomic disadvantages of women of color — who also lack the proper legal support and capital required in properly holding the officers accountable.

It took a 36-count indictment and numerous victims speaking out and all those other numbers in order to secure a lengthy prison sentence for Holtzclaw.

However, despite Holtzclaw being found guilty on all charges pertaining to six of the black women who testified against him and some charges affecting two of them – the jury found him not guilty of 18 charges of crimes against five other women. Those women received no personal justice.

This is what our criminal justice system looks like for those who are victims of police sexual violence. Vulnerability, desperation, interrogation and stigma pervade spaces where Lady Justice should be wearing a blindfold to race, gender and class. Instead we are given a reminder that such justice is only given grudgingly, if at all, to women.

And the often-ignored sexual abuse that continues to cripple our trust and faith in law-enforcement. As much as my life as a young black man is beginning to matter to the media, I'm hoping that the experiences of diverse sexual assault victims matter as well.

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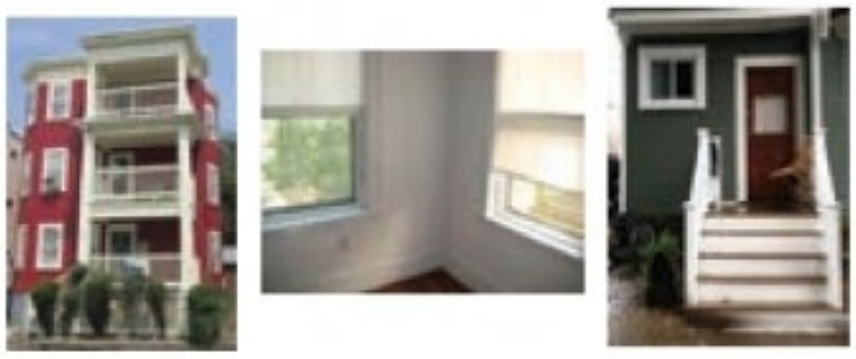

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Facebook puts a price on suburban living for employees

Facebook is offering employees at its Silicon Valley headquarters at least $10,000 to move closer to the office, a reflection of the challenges many tech companies face in the increasingly expensive and congested San Francisco Bay area.

To qualify for the payment, which the social networking firm started offering in the last 12 months, according to current and former Facebook workers, employees must buy or rent a home within 10 miles of the Facebook campus at One Hacker Way, a desolate strip of road overlooking a marsh about 30 miles south of San Francisco.

Some Facebook employees with families to support could earn a one-off payment of $15,000 or more for housing costs.

Facebook's efforts, along with similar programs at some other technology companies including investment management technology company Addepar, data company Palantir and software firm SalesforceIQ, a unit of Salesforce.com Inc, could help ease a major source of tension in San Francisco: an influx of young, wealthy tech workers who commute to Silicon Valley on private buses and often displace lower-income residents.

But Silicon Valley has a housing affordability crisis of its own, and if Facebook's program gains traction it could further accelerate the gentrification of nearby communities, especially the low-income city of East Palo Alto.

"A lot of local families are going to get hurt," said John Liotti, chief executive officer of East Palo Alto community advocacy group Able Works.

Offices at Facebook headquarters in Palo Alto, California. GETTY IMAGES

Facebook said the program is not about social engineering. "Our benefits at Facebook are designed to support our employees and the people who matter most to them at all stages of life," a Facebook spokesman said.

Cynics suggest the company might be looking to encourage people to spend more time in the office while also cutting the cost of its luxury bus service, whose drivers recently unionized. REUTERS

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Adam Driver plays villainous Kylo Ren in "Star Wars: The Force Awakens." LUCASFILM

wknd

THE FUN STARTS HERE

Oscar Isaac is pro-Jar Jar

The indie actor goes interstellar as a new "Star Wars" hero.

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Oscar Isaac has been doing a commendable job of not spilling any spoilers about "Star Wars: The Force Awakens," in which he plays Poe Dameron, one of the new generation of heroes in the storied franchise — and the Resistance's best pilot. Luckily while filming, Harrison Ford was around to give him some pointers on piloting a spaceship — or so Isaac thought.

How difficult or easy has it been for you to keep your mouth shut about what happens in the film?
Pretty easy. It's kind of like when you have a gift for somebody, you don't want to tell them what it is before they open it.

What was your own personal history with the franchise growing up?
The first film I ever watched in the theater was "Return of the Jedi." It made a huge impression on me, and I became a big fan of it. My family are huge fans, so we would dress up and do "Star Wars"-themed parties whenever the new movies would come out and collect the toys. We would dress up as the characters and throw parties and learn the fight scenes.

What would you dress up as?
I'd dress up as a Gonk droid. It's a box. Just a gray box. Very lazy.

As an actor, how do you wrap your mind around joining a franchise like this?
It's hard to wrap your mind around it. In a way, you just try to diminish the whole thing a little bit and try to do the job that you know how to do, which is: How do you create this character? How do you make it interesting for yourself? How do you make him compelling and honest? So it was more about doing that and not thinking so much about the size of it.

Learning from the master

You're a "Star Wars" fan, so did you have embarrassing interactions with the original trilogy cast?
Not too embarrassing, no. You know, Harrison is very funny, and I would ask him questions about piloting and how I should pilot and what I should do, and he said, "Well, it's in space. So the rules don't apply. Just make it up." I also asked him, "How are you going to do all the action stuff?" And he just said, "I'm going to act it."

OK, so what's your honest opinion of Jar Jar Binks?
Am I happy about Jar Jar Binks or not happy about Jar Jar Binks? Um … uh … I love Jar Jar Binks.

Really? Because, you know, he has his detractors out there.
That's why. I always root for the underdog. Or the under-Gungan.

There's a fan theory now that he's a Sith lord.
I know. I've heard about this. It's a bit of a reach, I think. He's just all good.

And are you excited to work with director Rian Johnson next on "Episode VII"?
I hope I get to.

Oscar Isaac
GETTY IMAGES

The stars of 'Star Wars' speak

Director J.J. Abrams and the cast take you inside the making of "The Force Awakens." NED EHRBAR

J.J. ABRAMS (DIRECTOR)

J.J. Abrams GETTY IMAGES

Coming on board:
"This is a project that I felt incredibly lucky to be asked to be a part of. I think I speak for all of us, except for maybe Harrison, when I say this was not a job," he says before laughing. "I'm kidding, Harrison was unbelievable. But the process of this movie — to a person on the crew, to a person on the cast — this was not a job. This was nothing that I think any one of us took on because it was a gig that was available. It was something that felt like a true passion."

The guiding principle:
"At the very beginning, it was about knowing why we were telling this story, and it was to give people that sense of possibility and magic that we all felt when we first saw the original 'Star Wars' movies," he explains. "It's not a nostalgia trip. We had to go backwards in order to go forwards."

His worst day at work:
"The scariest day for me was when Harrison Ford was injured, which is just absolutely hideous," Abrams remembers. "But every day felt like there were challenges, because I knew how important this was to so many people. That was never a presence that went away."

HARRISON FORD (HAN SOLO)

Harrison Ford chills as Han Solo. LUCASFILM

Coming back:
"It's always nice to anticipate working on something that you know people will have an appetite for. This is not a crap shoot. This is a big casino, and it's fun to play with these toys again," Ford says of returning to the franchise. "It seemed easy to come back to the character. Clothes make the man. I've walked more than a mile in those boots. I was interested in the described path of the character. I thought there was an interesting bit of business for the character to do."

Helping the kids:
"I'm not going to tell them how to navigate this very personal space of trying to figure out the careers that they've chosen for themselves," Ford says of John Boyega, Daisy Ridley and Oscar Isaac. "It's bizarrely individual how you navigate the space between where they're at now and the rest of your useful professional life. But they're in for a big ride, and they know it, I think. I hope they know it."

Tough crowd at home:
"My kids do not think I'm cool at all," Ford says with a laugh. "Being in this movie is not going to convince them otherwise. They're just glad to see that Dad is still working."

CARRIE FISHER (GENERAL LEIA ORGANA)

Carrie Fisher is back as Princess-turned-General Leia. LUCASFILM

Biggest fears going into the new movie:
"Not remembering my lines. That was scary," the outspoken Fisher says. "I'm the custodian of Princess Leia, so I never got out of character, and I wondered if that would be noticed. No, I was very nervous. It's been 40 years. It's been a long time. I don't like looking at myself at this age in a large way, so that was scary, and remains so."

Fastest to set:
"How long did it take to get into costume? About 10 minutes. I'm older, I do it faster," she says with a laugh. "No, really, 20 minutes."

JOHN BOYEGA (FINN)

John Boyega and Oscar Isaac try to fight the evil First Order in "Star Wars: The Force Awakens." LUCASFILM

Ignoring the haters:
"I've got to be honest, I really don't care about the black Stormtrooper stuff. I couldn't care less," Boyega says of the online uproar over his character reveal. "This is a movie about human beings, about Wookiees, spaceships and TIE fighters, and it has an undertone and a message of courage, and a message of friendship and loyalty, and I think that is something that is ultimately important."

Mysterious origins:
"I didn't know much going in, because of the spoilers and all that kind of stuff, but I do remember during my time screen-testing, I was like to Daisy, 'There's no way that our stories are so simple,'" Boyega says. "And we still don't know."

Behold, the junky Millennium Falcon is back in action. LUCASFILM

"Star Wars: The Force Awakens"

Director: J.J. Abrams
Stars: Daisy Ridley, John Boyega
Rating: PG-13

• • • • ◦

The good news comes early: "Star Wars: The Force Awakens" opens with a text crawl setting up a story that actually sounds fun. Back in 1999, "The Phantom Menace" began with the words "the taxation of trade routes." All J.J. Abrams' 30-years-later piece of fan fiction had to do was not start like a C-SPAN transcript.

Abrams goes one, two, maybe three better. The text reveals Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill) has vanished, and he's sought by warring factions known as "The First Order" and "The Resistance." We might not immediately realize these are actually the old, evil Empire and the old Rebel Alliance, renamed and repurposed but basically, after all these decades, the same thing.

"The Force Awakens" is basically the same, too. It does what the dreaded prequels refused to do: It gives us what we want. And what we want is more of the same.

The story is essentially a loose repeat of the original "Star Wars." There's another everyperson/maybe-savior — this time Daisy Ridley's resilient scavenger, Rey — living on a desert planet. She happens upon another intel-hoarding, bleep-bloopy robot: the mega-super-duper-holy-crap-adorable rollerball BB-8.

Nostalgic classics like the Millennium Falcon, beloved characters, another multicultural cantina, that John Williams score, those screen wipes — all get dusted off and soldiered out for our delectation. Everything old is basically what it was before, only either aged or with different faces.

But it's not exactly the same, just as "Creed" wasn't exactly a carbon copy of "Rocky." These two new films are brethren, and if they succeed at anything it's that sequels, even tardy ones, are superior to prequels and those dreaded origin stories that clog the multiplexes. Abrams' "Star Wars" tries to strike a balance between hitting all the usual beats and reworking them so they feel at least mostly fresh.

We can't, more or less legally, at this time spill much more on the plot, and especially a few of its fairly shocking turns, at least one of which was probably inevitable (but still shocks). But we can say its first hour is especially on point, with a plot that moves and twists like mad. It's as though Abrams and team saw how leaden and heavyfooted the prequels were and tried to do the opposite.

Gone is the overly digital, stiff look of the George Lucas-directed prequels. This one, directed by a fanboy for fanboys, was shot on film, with shots that are expressive, poetic, magisterial — all the things the prequels weren't.

It was the humanity, not the whooshing of lightsabers and goofy aliens, that made "Star Wars" great. "The Force Awakens" gets that more than it gets anything, which is why everything from a gizmo made of two spinning balls to Harrison Ford — an actor not always happy to be on screen, and definitely not always happy to be forever Han Solo — teems with life. MATT PRIGGE

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Maya Rudolph (with co-star John Leguizamo) does not like what she sees in "Sisters." K.C. BAILEY/UNIVERSAL PICTURES

Maya Rudolph doesn't do FOMO

The "Sisters" star on how staying off social media leads to a happier life.

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When "SNL" vet Maya Rudolph isn't busy being hilarious — like in the new comedy "Sisters" alongside Tina Fey and Amy Poehler — she's busy raising her four young children with her husband, filmmaker Paul Thomas Anderson. So it's understandable why she doesn't have much time for social media. But even she did, she'd avoid it all the same.

Your character, Brinda, has a major chip on her shoulder from high school. How was it playing that kind of long-held resentment?
It is fun. I think the insecurity of Brinda's character really is our own collective insecurity. Everybody wants to be invited to the party. That's sort of the worst possible feeling in terms of high school days. You don't want to be the person that's left off the list. I feel like with Brinda it's almost as if she was just waiting for Kate (played by Fey) to come back to her hometown so she could be like, "See? I've really got my life together." She's probably played it out in her head enough that she's practiced her head whip away. It's very dramatic, as an exit. She's thought about it a long time.

It's interesting how that FOMO turned her into a mean girl.
She has major FOMO. I just learned about FOMO. But everyone's got FOMO. Well, not everyone. Some people don't. Some people are actually content.

Twitter and Facebook have made it more pronounced.
Yes. I don't dabble in those things. Maybe I was just born so early in the '70s that it's just so hard for me to relate to the idea of sharing everything. I feel like if I was constantly doing that and not doing the other things I need to do, I would hate myself a little bit. I don't have enough time to do the things I'm supposed to be doing, so it would just feel like pure procrastination.

Has anyone ever pressured you to do it for work?
Yes. When I did my variety show, I was given a Twitter account. "You've got to announce it." "OK, I'll do it." And so I announced it, like, "Hey! My show's coming on. You should watch it." And the response was so crazy. I obviously had not set up my settings correctly, but people started responding and my phone would not stop. And I couldn't turn it off. It felt weird.

That sounds terrifying.
It was. And I'm not used to it. I'm not good at it. I'm good at other things.

Such as?
Roller skating. But not ice skating. And I do not know how to Rollerblade, either.

What's that smell?

The party in this movie looked crazy, but it could not have smelled very nice.
The only thing that was kind of gnarly was outside. It had a horrible smell from all the water in the sinkhole. It was a bummer. It kind of smelled like the inside of an old, wet cast. But inside the set it smelled wonderful. It wasn't like when you go to a bar at 10 a.m. and you smell last night and you're like, "I'm going to be sick. How did anybody spend time in here last night?"

This supersecret club is a must for foodies

Dinner Lab's pop-up parties open doors for new chefs.

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The Boston Dinner Lab launch in February at Chevalier Theater in Medford. TYSON SMITHX

What if you let your chef chose your meal for you? What if you didn't even know the location of said meal until 24 hours before your reservation? And what if you were told to leave your high heels at home?

Welcome to the unusual dining experience that is Dinner Lab, a 3-year-old New Orleans-based, members-only culinary club that hosts 24-hour experimental pop-up restaurants in 31 U.S. cities — and boasts no fees. It launched as a monthly event in Boston in late February and has since grown to a bimonthly affair. Members are notified of the events' themes and chefs, and a few weeks in advance can purchase tickets ranging $50-$80 a person. Boozy pairings, a multicourse meal and gratuity are all included.

The secret location adds to the spontaneity of the evening, as do the vague environmental restrictions, including a "no stilettos" policy adopted for a recent evening at Central Square's Green Street Studios. "You can't prepare in the same way you might usually prepare for a night out [at a restaurant]," says former Boston Community Manager Mara Littman.

Previous events include an hommage to Malasysian cuisine with Chef Mario Rodriguez at the Chevalier Theater in Medford and Chef Geoff Lukas' From Land to Sea menu at the Boston Button Factory on Melcher Street. This Friday, Journeyman alumn and Keflavik, Iceland, native Chef Robb Morrell will present an winter root vegetable-focused menu, with hay-roasted celeriac and grilled mackerel with preserved seabuckthorn on the menu. The night will end with goat cheese ice cream. The location was revealed Thursday morning as Union Square's Warehouse XI.

The events also offer an opportunity for aspiring and developing chefs to workshop menus and cuisines for a crowd. Following the meal, guests are asked to review each course and provide feedback to the culinary team.

Take Joubert Amazan, a 27-year-old South Ender who will make his Dinner Lab debut in early January. The first-generation Haitian-American will introduce a haute twist on the cuisine he grew up eating — including a traditional Soup Joumou, a pumpkin-squash braised-beef stew typically served on New Year's Day to celebrate Haiti's 1804 independence from France.

Amazan begin working as an on-call cook at Dinner Lab in April with Chef Lukas and says the experience has helped him grow his culinary experience beyond the kitchen.

"It's better than working at a restaurant for a year and moving on, because you get to experience different types of chefs and cuisines and their techniques," he says.

And since Dinner Lab is a naturally social event — with a cocktail hour, communal seating and mingling between kitchen staff and guests — the direct feedback from diners is as unavoidable as it is invaluable.

"You can tell from the way guests were eating through courses what they're really enjoying," says Amazan. "Guests will also approach us and chat when we're breaking down after the event. It makes me happy to get that kind of feedback. You know what you need to work on."

PATRIOTS RIGHT BACK IN AFC DRIVER'S SEAT

FanDuel Week 15 matchups to watch for

Only three weeks remain in the 2015 NFL regular season. It seems like only yesterday when we were in Week 1 and every team was undefeated and brimming with hope. Now, many teams have sealed their fate. Here are some matchups to watch in Week 15 that will have a distinct bearing on your FanDuel lineups.

Beckham vs. Norman

You cannot ask for a more elite matchup than Odell Beckham vs. Josh Norman. Both players are at the top of their game and deserve respect. But the Panthers aren't going to let Beckham waltz down the field. Carolina gives up the ninth fewest FanDuel points to wide receivers. Beckham may be too expensive for this week.

Belichick vs. Mariota

Even the best and/or most experienced quarterbacks in the NFL have a difficult time going up against the Patriots. Bill Belichick has been confusing quarterbacks with disguises since 2001, only five rookie quarterbacks have beaten Belichick-coached teams. Even with a reasonable $7,300 price tag, Mariota has little-to-no upside and probably has his lowest floor of the season.

Palmer vs. Eagles D

No only have the Cardinals gone 11-2 this season, Carson Palmer is second in the NFL in passing yards (4,003), touchdown passes (31) and passer rating (107.2). This is very bad news for the Eagles and their secondary this Sunday.

Lions at Saints

In Week 14, the "MNF" matchup was a showdown between two misfit toys — the Dolphins and Giants. Both of those teams struggle on defense, but the FanDuel points overflowed. There is potential for another "Monday Night Miracle" in this matchup and you will want to capitalize. The New Orleans defense is bad. Really bad. And Matthew Stafford is something of a bully when he faces bad defenses.

FanDuel

DANNY PICARD

OPINION

"The Danny Picard Show" airs every weekday at DannyPicard.com. Danny can also be heard on WEEI 93.7 FM. @dannypicard

Rob Gronkowski and the Patriots should stomp on the Titans this weekend. GETTY IMAGES

So that was interesting. For a few weeks, at least.

The New England Patriots lost their first game of the season on Nov. 29, in Denver, to a Broncos team that was without Peyton Manning. They also lost Rob Gronkowski to — what looked like at the time — a serious knee injury. That was Week 12, and as frustrated as a lot of us here in New England might have been, there were a couple things that eased the pain. First and foremost, Denver and the Cincinnati Bengals had already lost two games each, so the Patriots hadn't completely fallen off the throne just yet. Also, with Philadelphia, Houston, Tennessee, New York, and Miami on the back end of the schedule, the Patriots' road to remaining the top seed in the AFC didn't seem too difficult. Then came the loss to the Eagles at Gillette Stadium.

Whatever that was.

I still can't believe what happened in that game. Makes no sense. As the Patriots were suddenly knocked out of a first-round bye and down to the No. 3 seed, confusion and frustration began turning to hope late last week, as Gronkowski and Julian Edelman returned to practice. Gronkowski returned in Sunday's 27-6 win over the Texans in Houston. And combined with a Cincinnati loss to Pittsburgh — with Andy Dalton breaking his thumb in the process — and Denver somehow losing to Oakland, the 11-2 Patriots jumped right back up to the No. 1 seed in the AFC.

Edelman has yet to return to game action, and losing LeGarrette Blount and Dominique Easley for the year certainly won't make the rest of the season a cakewalk. But you should feel a whole lot better knowing that the Patriots once again control their own destiny when it comes to holding onto the top spot in the conference. The three games that New England has remaining are against Tennessee, the Jets, and Miami. Only one of those teams — the Jets — has a chance to make the playoffs. The Jets are realistically in a three-team race for the two wild-card spots in the AFC. And nothing is guaranteed, with Kansas City having one of the easier schedules in the league the rest of the way, and with Pittsburgh looking like one of the NFL's most dangerous teams. The Patriots could very well end the Jets' season on Dec. 27 if the Chiefs and Steelers take care of their own business. Before that, though, the Pats will have to defeat the Titans.

"All is once again right in the football world. The Patriots are back on top. And the only way they'll be dethroned is if they cut off their own head."

Barring another major collapse like the one we saw two weeks ago against Philadelphia, Tom Brady and Bill Belichick will lead their team to a 12th win. Then they'll watch the late games to see if A.J. McCarron can lead the Bengals to a win over the 49ers in San Francisco, or if the Broncos can slow down the Steelers in Pittsburgh. It's crunch time in the NFL, and the Patriots are trying to make sure the road to Super Bowl 50 goes through Foxboro. Something that, two weeks ago, suddenly became a major concern.

But don't worry. All is once again right in the football world. The Patriots are back on top. And the only way they'll be dethroned is if they cut off their own head.

3 Things to watch for as Patriots host the Titans

New England can grab its 12th win of the season Sunday at Gillette.

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The Patriots are your AFC East champions, and if it feels like it happened overnight, well, that's' because it did. When the Dolphins lost on "Monday Night Football," New England clinched its seventh straight AFC East crown, and 13th in the last 15 years. The Patriots winning the AFC East is becoming as common as snow in the winter.

And speaking of snow, the last time this week's opponent, the Tennessee Titans, traveled to Gillette Stadium in 2009, they lost in a blizzard to the Patriots, 59-0.

There's no snow in this week's forecast — and it's doubtful the Patriots can pull of a margin of victory as high as the last one — but the 3-10 Titans don't exactly pose the greatest threat to a Patriots team that had a nice bounce-back win in Houston last week.

Then again, with the injuries continuing to pile up, the Patriots can't take any team for granted.

1

Who's going to run the ball?

LeGarrette Blount went down with a hip injury – and now he's out for the season, too. So, who's left? Brandon Bolden has been serviceable in fill-in duty, but he's also an important player on special teams. James White is more of a pass-catching back than a rusher. The team signed former Broncos running back Montee Ball to the practice squad, and is reportedly interested in veteran Steven Jackson. Yes, the Patriots lean on Brady and the passing game, but not having a legit back like Blount is a real concern.

2

Contain Mariota

While the Titans aren't going anywhere this season, they at least have reason to believe the future is bright. Drafted second overall in the 2015 NFL Draft, Marcus Mariota has put together a nice rookie season. In 11 games, Mariota has thrown for 2,786 yards and 19 touchdowns with 10 interceptions. He's rushed for 252 yards and two touchdowns, one of which was an 87-yard run, and even caught a touchdown pass.

"He's very athletic but then he can throw the ball well," Bill Belichick said. "Makes good decisions on the run and he's got a lot of options at receiver and tight end when that happens."

The Patriots will be facing Marcus Mariota for the first time this Sunday. GETTY IMAGES

3

Hightower return?

The Dont'a Hightower injury went under the radar once Rob Gronkowski got hurt, but the truth is he's the most important part of that defense right now. With Jamie Collins healthy again, getting those two back in the middle of things will be a welcomed sight. Devin McCourty doesn't look to play this week, so the Patriots will need all the help on defense they can get.

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Aries It's important to stay focused if you want to get everything on your to-do list finished. Bring about change.

Taurus Put more into your relationships with others. Your undivided attention will be appreciated and rewarded.

Gemini Take a step back and be a friendly observer. Try to understand what others are going through and find ways to compensate.

Cancer Let your creative energy flow. Decorate your home for festivities or check out a course that will encourage you to learn new skills.

Leo Bring about change instead of waiting for it to come to you. A chance to travel or network will give you a better understanding.

Virgo Growing uncertainty about your direction and the people around you will be an issue. Reflect about what's happened in the past.

Libra Put a little muscle behind your ideas and plans. You will be able to make positive changes at home that will improve your relationships.

Scorpio Persistence coupled with relentless courage and desire will help you put your creative imagination to work.

Sagittarius Don't let the decisions of others get you down. Concentrate on your own objectives and don't stop until you achieve them.

Capricorn You'll be able to persuade others to see things your way. Taking a unique approach to handling people will improve your reputation.

Aquarius Don't feel pressured to help someone who takes advantage of you. Question the sincerity of those who take but don't give back.

Pisces You'll have plenty of creative ideas, and your imagination will help you find solutions to any problems that come your way. **EUGENIA LAST**

metro.us/crossword

Across

1 Flow slowly
5 Pocket janglers
9 Small job
13 Summit
14 Young screecher
15 Workout result
16 Rundown car
17 River or wine
18 Crayola choice
19 Sell in a hurry
21 Flight board info
22 "The Clan of the Cave Bear" author
23 Brings action
25 Explains further
27 Be disgraced (2 wds.)
31 Pleasure craft
35 What the hen did
36 Prunes a hedge
38 Ripple pattern
39 Midnight teller
40 Raw-fish delicacy
42 Anybody's sister
43 Cat calls
46 Animated character
47 "Et tu" time
48 Action-movie name
50 Double-checked (2 wds.)
52 Prepare tea
54 Prom rental
55 Bungle
58 Scribble down
60 Hoodwinked
64 Countess's spouse
65 It merged with BP
67 Mystique
68 Sidle past
69 Serena's sis
70 Salon rinse
71 Did batik
72 Moon — Zappa
73 Latin I verb

Down

1 Waikiki's island
2 Candid
3 Enthusiasm
4 Bare
5 Utility bill abbr.
6 Newsman — Abel
7 Gossipy type
8 Levelheaded
9 Hot sauce
10 Freedom org.
11 Elisabeth of "Soapdish"
12 Boat's bottom
14 Hardships
20 — Wiedersehen
24 Reconnoiter
26 Beaver project
27 Andes ruminant
28 Movie with a posse
29 Musicians Carly or Paul —
30 — salts
32 Ashram dweller
33 Straighter
34 Know somehow
37 Reef
41 Shades of blue
44 Tottered
45 35mm camera
47 Cut off
49 Eerie feeling (2 wds.)
51 "Down Under" bird
53 Females
55 Corn, to chickens
56 Godiva's title
57 Natural impulse
59 Braxton or Tennille
61 Filmmaker — Bunuel
62 Sea eagles
63 Evening out
66 Mow

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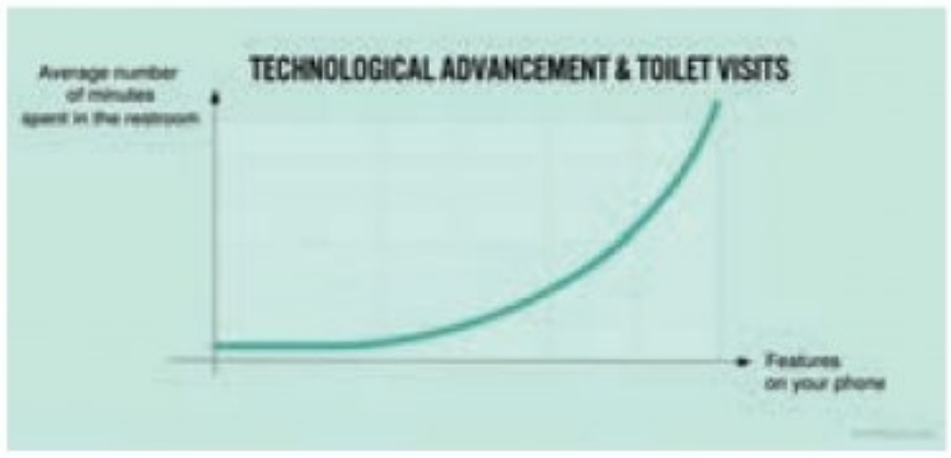

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metro.us/sudoku

easy

2			7				9	6
		5		6			2	
6						7	4	
3		8		2		4		
			5		4			
		4		8		3		7
	1	3						8
	7			9		5		
4	5				1			2

hard

	9		1		6	5	2	
	6		7			8		1
					5	6		
	1		9	2				6
6				3	1		5	
		4	5					
3		6			2		1	
	2	9	3		8		4	

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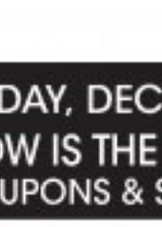

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Reg. $80-$135, after 2 pm: 59.99-101.25 From left: ★ WebID 1714309 & ★ 1718334.

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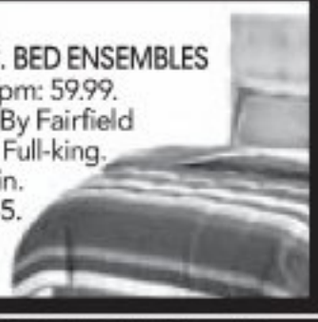
Reg. $100, after 2pm: 59.99. **Only at Macy's.** By Fairfield Square Collection. Full-king. Shown: **new** Austin. ★ WebID 2383985.



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